

LEXINGTON PARK, MD –Congressman Steny Hoyer (D-MD) today spoke at the Maryland Economic Development Association (MEDA) Spring Conference on how BRAC presents significant opportunities for economic growth and development for the state, and how the federal, state and local entities can work together to prepare for BRAC related changes

Following are Congressman Hoyer's remarks as prepared for delivery.

During last fall's campaign season here in Maryland, I heard a line used several times – by several different candidates – that does a very good job of describing the challenges facing those who are charged with guiding Maryland's economic growth.

It goes: we must ensure that Maryland's character defines our development, rather than let development define Maryland's character.

That line stuck with me because it reminds us that while economic growth is absolutely vital to Maryland's future, it must proceed in a way that enhances our communities and maintains the outstanding quality of life we enjoy here in the old line state.

Finding that middle ground that exists somewhere between growth and sprawl will be your primary mission in the coming years – so I couldn't be happier to see that you are gathering here today to discuss the proactive steps that will allow us to make the most of the opportunities that lie ahead.

During the 1990s, the BRAC process presented some amazing opportunities for growth here in southern Maryland – and we were able to take full advantage of those opportunities because we realized that when opportunity knocks, there is more to it than simply opening the door.

If you aren't prepared and properly positioned to maximize the benefits of these chances when they come along, then it becomes profoundly difficult to turn potential into progress and move forward in a way that improves Marylanders lives.

Here in 2007, opportunity is knocking once again in the form of another successful round of base realignment decisions that are going to foster growth in Maryland's job market and population centers.

So I would like to spend some time today discussing what we did right here in southern Maryland the last time around, so that the lessons we learned can translate into BRAC success throughout other parts of this great state here in the 21st century.

Maryland is well poised to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the BRAC process. We are one of the wealthiest states in the nation, with an economy that grows stronger with each passing day. We have a well-educated, highly-skilled workforce from which to draw a wealth of talent and experience.

And our proximity to the nation's capital makes Maryland a natural choice when the defense department makes decisions to consolidate its resources.

All of you deserve a great deal of credit for Maryland being as well-prepared as it is for this massive transition of DOD personnel – and we are going to be depending on your leadership to carry us the rest of the way.

You see, the BRAC process relies on a time-driven decision that can be reversed if Maryland does not demonstrate that it is up to the task at hand. The law allows six years to make this move – and the clock is already ticking.

Without strong community support, from both the public and private sectors, the opportunities before us can greatly diminish or even vanish entirely – and with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan taking up a great deal of military resources, we must be sure not to give the department of defense any reason to reverse or delay this process.

That is why it is absolutely imperative that the public and private sectors work together. When we learned the BRAC process of the 1990s was going to bring 8,000 new jobs to the naval air station at Patuxent River, local leaders did not waste any time.

With the tri-county council taking the lead, local chambers of commerce and local EDC officials worked with the public sector to prepare for the moves. Senator J. Frank Raley headed a regional task force of 14 public and private sector leaders that met for six months and identified 22 regional priorities that had to be addressed in order to successfully absorb the growth in our communities.

Because local jurisdictions worked together to devise this list of funding needs, they did not have to compete with one another for limited resources.

And because the stakeholders in the BRAC process were highly organized and perfectly clear as to what was needed to fully take advantage of BRAC, they made a case that Governor Glendening and the general assembly could not refuse, and they proved to the DOD that southern Maryland was serious about making this transition of personnel as smooth and as painless as possible.

Partnership between the public and private sectors, and between local jurisdictions as well – along with a proactive approach to confronting the challenges that BRAC presented – was the key to our success.

And I cannot stress enough just how important it is that you follow the same path. The question you must answer right now is not which transportation project or infrastructure improvement is most important – the question before you is whether you are willing to work together towards our shared goals, whatever those goals might be.

Here in 2007, you have an outstanding roster of public officials to work with. Governor O'Malley has named Anthony Brown as his point person on BRAC, and I don't think there is anyone better suited for the job – after all, before he became Lt. Governor, Anthony Brown was a Lt. Colonel in United States Armed Forces.

Newly installed Transportation Secretary, John Porcari, is a seasoned veteran whose knowledge and expertise are second to none. Your lunchtime speaker, DBED Secretary David Edgerly, is focused on BRAC as one of the foremost challenges facing our state. And I can tell

you that your congressional delegation is engaged and committed to success as well.

Your elected representatives and their appointees understand how important this opportunity is to Maryland's future – and we are looking forward to establishing a new partnership that will bear fruit in places like Aberdeen, Bethesda, Fort Meade, and a host of others – just as it did here in southern Maryland.

Since the last round of BRAC moves were absorbed here in St. Mary's, the successes we have enjoyed are undeniable.

We have maintained one of Maryland's lowest unemployment rates, which is consistently below the state average and frequently below 3 percent. We led the state in personal income growth in 2001 and 2003. And we even enjoyed the highest property re-assessment growth in the state of Maryland in 2006 – at 84.3 percent.

But none of these successes came without challenges – it was not automatic. Our progress demanded partnership between a variety of parties and a proactive mindset to take shape.

That is how we made the most of the opportunity before us in 1990s – and it is how you will do the same in your own communities here in 2007.

Thank you.

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